

Higher Manas

Definitional Essay

Theosophy Trust

Higher *Manas* is the enduring thinking individuality that gathers the spiritual and moral fruits of experience through successive lives. It stands behind the changing personalities through which experience is gained. The word higher identifies a spiritual orientation and level of consciousness. It does not mean that an educated person is worth more than an uneducated one. The inquiry concerns the use and source of intelligence: how the mind can become receptive to wisdom and carry that wisdom into the circumstances of a particular life.

In *The Secret Doctrine*, H.P. Blavatsky identifies the human Ego with higher *Manas*, distinguishing it from *Atman* and *Buddhi*. *Atman* is the universal spiritual principle; *Buddhi* is its vehicle, the spiritual soul. *Manas* supplies the self-conscious thinking individuality. These distinctions prevent the familiar personal sense of “I” from being mistaken for the whole spiritual constitution. A person can speak confidently about the universal Self while still judging everything by the comfort, reputation, and ambitions of a temporary personality.

The Key to Theosophy adds an essential qualification. *Manas* is called the Spiritual Ego when united with *Buddhi*. Thus higher mind and spiritual illumination are closely related without being interchangeable expressions in every context. Intellectual capacity alone does not establish wisdom. The mind needs the illuminating influence of *Buddhi* if its power to concentrate and understand is to become an instrument of spiritual discernment. Studying these distinctions can make us more modest about what we know and more attentive to how we use it.

Blavatsky’s image is a golden thread on which different personalities are strung like beads. Each life has its particular setting, relationships, limitations, and opportunities. The thread represents continuity through these changes. Reincarnation, in this account, is the education of an enduring individuality. It is not the indefinite preservation of every personal preference. What gives a life spiritual significance is the quality of understanding and aspiration developed through experience, including the capacities for truthfulness and unselfish action that experience can call forth.

The image also changes the scale of responsibility. A difficult lesson need not be measured only by immediate success. We may learn to acknowledge an error, to remain faithful through discouragement, or to care without demanding recognition. Such efforts are meaningful within the soul’s continuing development even when no public achievement marks them. The doctrine offers a reason to take daily conduct seriously while allowing the personality’s changing fortunes to occupy a more proportionate place in our conception of ourselves.

Professor Iyer develops the relation between higher and lower mind in “Eros and Kamadeva.” *Manas* is dual in its activity: its lower aspect associates with *kama*, desire, while its higher aspect turns toward *Buddhi*. These are directions within the life of mind, rather than two unrelated minds competing for possession of a person. The thinking power that serves a possessive demand can learn to understand that demand and reconsider it. Its light can be redirected toward a concern that reaches beyond private satisfaction.

Affection makes this teaching especially intimate. We may sincerely care for someone and still wish to determine the shape of that person’s future. Anxiety can supply excellent arguments for interference. Higher understanding asks whether the proposed help serves the other person’s growth or mainly quiets our own uncertainty. In Professor Iyer’s account, love becomes more spiritual as desire is brought under a mind aspiring toward *Buddhi*. Feeling retains warmth, while relinquishing some of the insistence that another life must fulfill our preferred design.

Imagine an experienced craftsperson teaching an apprentice. The apprentice chooses a method the teacher would not have used, yet produces sound work. A possessive response demands imitation; a more generous response examines what the new method makes possible. The teacher can explain a genuine weakness without requiring every successful detail to bear the teacher’s signature. The skill accumulated over years becomes a resource offered to another person. Understanding is then carried forward through an individual whose independence the teacher has helped to strengthen.

Drawing a Larger Circle of Conception, in this situation, means seeing beyond one’s own completed work to the continuing life of the craft and the people who will inherit it. The teacher’s individuality is expressed through responsible judgment, not diminished by the apprentice’s freedom. This gives Human Solidarity a precise form. What we know can become a contribution to a shared future. The person receiving it need not become an extension of ourselves for that contribution to be real and enduring.

Higher *Manas* is also related to the capacity to change perspective. In “Dateless and Deathless,” Professor Iyer describes an inward power to step aside from the participating, reacting self. The same event can be considered within a narrow personal frame or within a longer and more inclusive horizon. The change begins in thought, but it matters because conduct follows perception. Someone who can reconsider the frame of a disagreement has gained an opportunity to respond more justly, even before the disagreement itself is resolved.

Meditation gives this power a deliberate discipline. Attention is gathered around an idea worthy of sustained inquiry, and the student returns to it when habitual concerns intrude. Professor Iyer’s “The Forward Impulse” connects constructive self-conception with spiritual growth. Contemplating the qualities of a sage can orient effort toward a more generous possibility of

being. Such contemplation calls for practice. Admiring steadfastness is useful when it helps us keep an obligation; contemplating impartiality is useful when it changes a judgment we were reluctant to examine.

The lower mental faculties remain necessary to this work. An inclusive understanding still needs a person who can remember a commitment, explain a method, and notice what a learner has not understood. Higher *Manas* does not make these ordinary abilities dispensable. It gives them an orientation and asks that they be developed faithfully. Spiritual discernment and practical skill can cooperate when the same concern for truth guides both the inward purpose and its detailed expression.

This approach also guards against spiritual vanity. The doctrine of a higher individuality is easily borrowed by the personality as a flattering description of itself. Claims about past greatness or inward rank can obscure the simpler question of present reliability. A more searching response is to ask whether thought has become less evasive and whether others can depend on our word. The personality becomes a clearer instrument through these ordinary disciplines. The higher principle is honored by what can pass through the instrument into daily action.

Professor Iyer's description of *Buddhi* in "The Daimon" joins expansive sympathy with a sense of proportion and fitness. That union helps explain why the higher mind need not be cold. A thoughtful correction can take another person's circumstances into account while remaining accurate. Compassion need not abandon distinctions; it can make the distinctions more useful. A mind that understands both the principle and the person is better placed to choose the right words, the right occasion, and the measure of help that can actually be received.

The golden thread remains a quiet invitation to continuity of effort. We cannot reconstruct its whole course from the memories of one life, but we can attend to the understanding this life asks of us. Each situation offers material for the education of the thinker. When intelligence becomes less possessive and more faithful to truth, the personality can serve something larger than its own account of success. What is learned may then be offered freely, with the patience of someone who knows that the work of the soul continues.

Glossary

Ahankara — I-making or the formation of self-reference; also spelled *Ahamkara*. Professor Iyer distinguishes personal identification from higher or universal self-consciousness.

Archetypal — Pertaining to a fundamental pattern or ideal underlying particular expressions.

Architectonic — Concerned with the proportion and coherent organization of a whole; used in the quotation to describe spiritual discernment.

Astral — Pertaining to the subtle form or field associated in Theosophy with embodied life and psychic impressions.

Atman — The universal spiritual principle, also written *Atma*; distinguished from the personal sense of self.

Barhishad Pitris — The lunar ancestors associated in Theosophy with the formation of the lower human vehicles; contrasted with the *Agnishwatta Pitris*.

Buddhi — The spiritual soul or vehicle of *Atman*; associated with intuitive discernment. Buddhic means pertaining to *Buddhi*.

Causal body — A designation for the enduring vehicle of spiritual individuality, associated with higher *Manas* and *Karana Sarira*.

Centrifugal — Directed outward from a center; the quotation uses it for the expansive sympathy associated with *Buddhi*.

Daimon — In the title of Professor Iyer's essay, an overbrooding spiritual intelligence or genius; distinct from the ordinary sense of an evil demon.

Efflorescence — A flowering or developed expression; used of the fruition of higher self-conscious intelligence.

Ego — A center of self-consciousness; the sources distinguish the higher or spiritual Ego from the temporary personal Ego.

Egotism — Self-centered appropriation or assertion. Some older quoted usage qualifies the term to refer instead to higher spiritual self-consciousness.

Higher Manas — The enduring thinking individuality, distinguished from its personal or lower ray; spiritual illumination involves its union with *Buddhi*.

Human Solidarity — Shared human dignity and interdependence, expressed through considerate responsibility for others.

Ideation — The activity or formative power of thought; in the sources, also the spiritual patterns underlying manifestation.

Individuality — The enduring thinking Ego in Theosophical usage, distinguished from the personality of a particular life.

Kama — Desire or passion in the human constitution; in cosmic symbolism, also an impulse toward creation or universal good. Kamic means pertaining to *kama*.

Kamadeva — The deity of love or desire; in Theosophical cosmology, a symbol of an all-embracing creative desire for universal good.

Karana Sarira — Causal body; in the quotation, a designation associated with higher *Manas* and the continuity of spiritual individuality. Also written *Karana Sharira*.

Kriyashakti — The power of thought or creative ideation in Theosophical teaching; the quotation connects it with constructive spiritual self-conception.

Lower Manas — The personal or projected ray of mind, working through embodied faculties and capable of association with desire or guidance from higher understanding.

Lunar and solar — Symbolic terms for the lower reflected and higher illuminating orientations of mind in these passages.

Mahat — Universal Mind or cosmic intelligence. Mahat-mic is a related adjectival form used for this higher intelligent element.

Manas — The thinking principle or self-conscious mind; its higher individuality and lower personal ray are distinguished. Manasic means pertaining to *Manas*.

Monad — A spiritual unit; in the human constitution, commonly *Atman* with *Buddhi*, related to the enduring individuality through *Manas*.

Personality — The temporary personal constitution, memories, and roles of a particular life, distinguished from the enduring individuality.

Plane — A level or mode of being or consciousness; not necessarily a location in physical space.

Reincarnation — The return of the enduring individuality through successive embodied lives in Theosophical teaching.

Sentient — Capable of sensation or feeling; in these passages, used for awareness associated with the embodied instruments.

Sutratman — Thread-soul, also written *Sutratma*; the golden-thread image of spiritual continuity through successive personalities.

Taijasi — Radiant; in the quoted passage, *Manas* united with the higher spiritual principles.

Talisman — An object or idea regarded as carrying a sustaining influence; the quotation uses the word for a potent conception of oneself.

Transcendence — A standpoint or reality exceeding a particular set of limitations; transcendent and transcendental are related forms.

Vehicle — An instrument or means through which a principle of consciousness is expressed.

Vesture — A sheath or vehicle through which consciousness acts; often used of the temporary human instruments.

Quotes for Meditation and Self Study

1. H.P. Blavatsky — *The Secret Doctrine*, Volume II — p. 79

“The human Ego is neither *Atman* nor *Buddhi*, but the higher *Manas*: the intellectual fruition and the efflorescence of the intellectual self-conscious Egotism—in the higher spiritual sense. The ancient works refer to it as *Karana Sarira* on the plane of *Sutratma*, which is the golden thread on which, like beads, the various personalities of this higher Ego are strung.”

Meditation thought: The golden thread gives individuality a continuity larger than one personality. Consider what this life is teaching the thinker, and what quality of understanding is being formed through its changing circumstances.

2. R.N. Iyer — *The Gupta Vidya*, Volume III — “The Forward Impulse” — p. 388

“Clearly, the common difficulty in releasing the creative potential for growth lies in the absurd way so many people identify themselves wholly or largely with the shadowy psychophysical vestures. This is, in fact, a direct inversion and costly misappropriation of the quintessential and defining principle of man – *Manas*. How one employs the creative mind in thinking of oneself is a potent talisman and, according to Shankara, the chief key to both bondage and liberation.”

Meditation thought: How we conceive ourselves influences the possibilities we can recognize. A personal role has practical value, yet it need not define the whole range of intelligence and responsibility available to the learner.

3. R.N. Iyer — *The Gupta Vidya*, Volume I — “Dateless and Deathless” — p. 103

“These capacities to alter perspectives, to expand horizons and to deepen perceptions all spring from the fundamental capacity to ideate. At its very deepest core, the Self is eternally ideating and eternally watching, but this vital truth is obscured by the extent to which one becomes wholly identified with the participating and reacting self.”

Meditation thought: A wider perspective becomes possible when attention is less absorbed in the reacting self. Look again at a familiar difficulty and allow its longer relations to modify the meaning first assigned to it.

4. H.P. Blavatsky — *The Key to Theosophy* — p. 77

“This consciousness or mind is, III. *Manas*, the derivation or product in a reflected form of *Ahamkara*, ‘the conception of I,’ or EGO-SHIP. It is, therefore, when inseparably united to the first two, called the SPIRITUAL EGO, and *Taijasi* (the radiant). This is the real Individuality, or the divine man.”

Meditation thought: The first two principles are *Atman* and *Buddhi*. Their union with *Manas* clarifies why spiritual individuality involves more than personal self-assertion: the thinking power becomes receptive to a source beyond its customary claims.

5. H.P. Blavatsky — *The Key to Theosophy* — p. 101

“The clue lies in the double consciousness of our mind, and also, in the dual nature of the mental ‘principle.’ There is a spiritual consciousness, the Manasic mind illumined by the light of *Buddhi*, that which subjectively perceives abstractions; and the sentient consciousness (the lower Manasic light), inseparable from our physical brain and senses.”

Meditation thought: The mind’s direction matters as much as its activity. Study the difference between thought organized by immediate impressions and thought that becomes clearer through an impartial concern for truth.

6. H.P. Blavatsky — *The Key to Theosophy* — p. 99

“THE INNER, or HIGHER ‘Ego’ is *Manas*, the ‘Fifth’ Principle, so called, independently of *Buddhi*. The Mind-Principle is only the Spiritual Ego when merged into one with *Buddhi*, — no materialist being supposed to have in him such an Ego, however great his intellectual capacities. It is the permanent Individuality or the ‘Reincarnating Ego.’”

Meditation thought: Blavatsky distinguishes the higher thinking individuality from its spiritual illumination through *Buddhi*. Read the terminology as an account of faculties and their relation, rather than as a reason to judge another person’s worth.

7. H.P. Blavatsky — *The Theosophical Glossary* — p. 204

“*Manas* (Sk.). Lit., ‘the mind’, the mental faculty which makes of man an intelligent and moral being, and distinguishes him from the mere animal; a synonym of *Mahat*. Esoterically, however, it means, when unqualified, the Higher EGO, or the sentient reincarnating Principle in man.”

Meditation thought: The definition connects intelligence with moral responsibility. The capacity to understand can be developed as a power of considerate choice, rather than measured only by speed of reasoning or the accumulation of information.

8. R.N. Iyer — *The Gupta Vidya*, Volume I — “Eros and Kamadeva” — p. 399

“In *The Secret Doctrine* H.P. Blavatsky gives the key to the transmutation of finite love when she repeats the ancient teaching that *Manas* is dual – lunar in the lower, solar in its upper portion. It is attracted in its higher aspect towards *Buddhi*, the seat of true love and real compassion, but in its lower aspect it descends into and listens to the voice of its animal soul, full of selfish and sensual desires.”

Meditation thought: Love asks something of the mind that directs it. Consider whether thought is helping affection become more generous or mainly finding persuasive reasons for the personal claims attached to it.

9. R.N. Iyer — *The Gupta Vidya*, Volume I — “Eros and Kamadeva” — p. 399

“The imperishable thread of radiance which is *Manas* serves man as a medium between the highest and the lowest, the spiritual man and the physical brain. When the lunar aspect of *Manas* is positive, *kama* in man, like the *Barhishad Pitris*, is possessed of creative fire but devoid of the MAHAT-mic element.”

Meditation thought: The thread links spiritual purpose with the embodied instrument. Its light becomes useful through attention to the relation between the aim we affirm inwardly and the choices through which we express it.

10. R.N. Iyer — *The Gupta Vidya*, Volume I — “Eros and Kamadeva” — p. 400

“Such love can only arise when *kama* is under the influence, even if intermittently, of a *Manas* that tends upwards to *Buddhi*. This love is silent rather than clamorous in its expression, marked by inward depth rather than by outward display. The silences of love lie in wait for us, night and day, at our threshold, and those who have loved deeply in this way come to learn many secrets that are unknown to others, the secrets of sharing and sacrifice and duty well done.”

Meditation thought: A quiet affection can leave the other person room to grow. Notice how care changes when sharing, sacrifice, and a faithfully fulfilled duty matter more than a visible demonstration of feeling.

11. R.N. Iyer — *The Gupta Vidya*, Volume I — “The Daimon” — p. 315

“*Buddhi*, or divine discernment, is the centrifugal principle of expansive sympathy together with an exalted feeling for the fitness of things, for archetypal justice and for architectonic proportion. On the other hand, *Manas* is the cool capacity for total concentration, bringing together to one centre the potential power of thought and the active energy of ideation, which in itself is unrestricted, unconditional and boundless.”

Meditation thought: Expansive sympathy and concentrated thought can strengthen one another. Compassion gains precision when the mind studies the situation carefully, while concentration acquires a more generous purpose through concern for the whole.

12. R.N. Iyer — *The Gupta Vidya*, Volume III — “The Forward Impulse” — p. 388

“The capacity to think constructively of oneself is intimately connected with the mysterious power of *Kriyashakti*, and is crucial to the gaining of self-conscious immortality. Without vainly attempting to pry into arcane mysteries, anyone may begin to draw upon this sovereign power through mystic meditation. One may take the sublime portrait of the Self-Governed Sage – associating it, if one wishes, with an actual statue or picture – and think of the resplendent qualities of the Silent Sage, adoring and apprehending them, assimilating them in one's heart and mind. Thus can one actively and deliberately undertake a subtle process of transformation in one's own astral sphere.”

Meditation thought: A spiritual exemplar gives aspiration a direction. Let contemplation of a worthy quality become a particular effort today, so that the image supports a change in conduct rather than merely an admired possibility.